

## Coalescence by Chebella1771

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**Summary:** "What's up, Doc?" Hopper quipped, trying to lighten the heavy fog of the room. Doctor Owens gave a tight-lipped smile as he reached forward to shake the Chief's hand. Hopper coughed again. - The Upside Down lingers as the crew begins a new school year, new relationships, and discovers new information regarding the place they all want to forget so badly. Jancy, Jopper, Mileven.

## 1. Chapter 1

Plot wouldn't leave me alone, so out it goes. Starts off slow, but hang in there. Feel free to comment and critique. SPOILERS for S2. Happy reading!

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Nancy cut the engine of her family's new Audi Quattro and removed the keys from the ignition. Its navy blue sheen reflected in the sunlight as she closed the car door with a dull 'thud' and made her way up the sizzling pavement. Her mom had thankfully let her borrow their new automobile for the day, and though Nancy had received a strict warning to drive slowly and carefully, she had sped the entire way here.

Hawkins National Laboratory. The U.S. Department of Energy. Or, as Nancy had always thought of it: Hell.

Today, Hawkins Lab presented itself as a medical facility, running tests and blood work and buzzing with the hum of radiographs being taken and developed. "Nurses" were scurrying around corners and down the fluorescently lit, chalk-white hallways, balancing vials and stacks of paper, beakers, and trays of instruments. As Nancy neared her destination, she could see a few chairs placed outside of the room she was going to enter, as if they were for friends, or family, waiting for visitation hours to see a loved one. No one sat in any of the seats provided. She thought of how the chairs had once been occupied earlier last year, everyone waiting for good news regarding Mike's friend Will's health. But all of that had passed now, and she pushed the memory away. Nancy looked up at one of the cameras above the doorframe and huffed out a breath in aggravation before turning the handle of the solid metal door in front of her and giving it a strong push.

Jonathan's hand was cold in hers as she walked over to his side and squeezed it.

"Anything yet?" she asked. He shook his head and put an arm around her waist, pulling her into his frame. She reciprocated by letting her arms hang loose around his hips as she rested her weight against him

and gave a sympathetic smile to Joyce, who was seated across from them in a rather uncomfortable looking metal recliner of sorts. The woman was more than familiar to her now, what with their adventures against creatures of another realm, the saving of her youngest son, and – more recently – Nancy being head-over-heels for her eldest. And so, no matter how uncomfortable Joyce looked or how noticeable Jonathan's mask of concern was on his face, Nancy felt at ease. Because she was lucky. Because even with their last school year getting ready to begin tomorrow, Jonathan insisted he be a companion to his mother in this wretched place instead of enjoying his last day of summer. And so both Joyce and Nancy were lucky. And the least Nancy could do was be here for her boyfriend like he was for everyone else....

Joyce Byers was wringing her hands. Then plucking at her fingernails. Then glancing at the clock and letting out a puff of air. 1:17PM it read, the red letters glaring against the digitalized black frame. Joyce pulled at her jacket sleeves once more for what seemed like the twentieth time. Eyes back to the clock, another sigh. She smoothed the pocket of her work jacket. 1:18PM.

"Joyce. Please. For the love of God," Hopper groaned from the cot, "just sit still for two seconds. Please." With his eyes closed and his body dressed in a white hospital gown adorned with tiny blue flowers, the Hawkins Chief of Police hardly sounded threatening. But she was making him irritated, and he hadn't even been watching her. He could practically feel her nervous energy sinking through his skin. He let out a cracking cough, thumping a fist on his chest a few times. This, more than his words, spurred Joyce to action.

Joyce threw her hands in the air and jumped to her feet. The steel recliner gave a lurch as she stood. "What, Hop! What. How do you expect me to sit here and *wait* like this!? I mean...I mean, come *on*! It's been over an hour, Hop, an *hour*." She headed for the door, but did not reach it before a greying man in a white lab coat entered the room, a hefty chart in his left hand and his right resting on a child's shoulder as he eased her through the doorway.

"Hey, kid," Hopper called. Elle gave a small smile and went to stand by the Chief's right bedside after giving a half-hearted side hug to Joyce. The Chief gave Eleven's arm a soft little punch, both of them

smirking at each other like they'd just shared an inside joke. "What's up, Doc?" Hopper quipped, trying to lighten the heavy fog of the room. Doctor Owens gave a tight-lipped smile as he reached forward to shake the Chief's hand. Hopper coughed again.

"Easy does it, Chief. So we ran some tests..." he started.

"I'm aware," the Chief deadpanned. The Band-Aids and taped gauze all over his arms and backs of his hands only proved his point.

Owens chuckled. "Fair enough, my friend. I guess we should move on to the important bits, then." He dragged one of the chairs from the hall into the center of the room and settled in the middle of their makeshift circle like a teacher during story-time. "I assume you all have taken standard biology – flora and fauna, animal and plant kingdoms – you know, high school stuff," he gave Nancy and Jonathan a look of reasoning, as if he were asking for their assistance. They both nodded, urging him to continue. "Now living organisms – those responding to stimuli – have been grouped into different categories. It helps us differentiate between all the various traits of specimen. You may have learned about fungi – another name for mushrooms–"

"I am *trying*," Joyce started, going back and forth between keeping her curled fingers to her lips and shaking a single digit Owens, "to hear you out, here, Dr. Owens. I am. But can you... can you please just tell us what is going on!? We have been *waiting*, in this... awful!...place, and we just want answers, not a lesson that takes me back to third period!" She huffed and cut her eyes to Hopper when he coughed again, a little sorry after her outbreak, but faced the doctor with her eyebrows raised in expectation. Jonathan looked at Nancy and squeezed her hand tighter.

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"You asshole!"

"Haha! That's *it*. Best three out of five!" Lucas pumped his fist in the air. "I think I'll take your...hm...Panthro! You can bring it to class tomorrow." Lucas was practically radiating smugness as he put his leftover quarter into his pants pocket and started walking to find Mike and Will.

"How is that even fair!? Pac-Man isn't even hard-"

"Apparently it is for you-"

"-and how can you even justify dividing *the Thundercats!* It's blasphemy of-"

"Dustin! Lucas! Over here!" Mike was waving them over to an air hockey machine with "OUT OF ORDER" written on a taped sheet of paper hanging on its side. "Are you ready? Will has to go."

Will zipped up his jacket and put his hands in his pockets. "Sorry guys....You can stay if you want," he said, feeling guilty he had to cut his friends' fun short.

"Oh, save it," Dustin said, giving Lucas a shove sideways for good measure. "My hand-eye coordination has *not* been doing me any favors today and I need to resupply my stock." He pulled at the inside of his pockets, exposing the lining and lack of quarters. "I'm out."

"Yeah, we'll go with you, Will," said Mike, swinging his arm around Will's shoulder. "Besides, I want to see the look on Elle's face when we surprise her!"

Lucas and Dustin started making kissy faces and smooching sounds. "Oooh, Eleven!" "I miss you, Eleven, even though I just saw you yesterday!" "I lovvve you, Elle!"

Will let a snicker escape at Mike's reddened face.

"Cut it *out*, guys." Mike said as he rolled his eyes and hopped on his bike. The other boys followed suit and they all began pedaling down all-too-familiar paths and roads, dipping in and out of neighborhoods and zooming through grassy fields.

It was now nearing the evening, and the sun was beginning to set. The good people of Hawkins were by now settled in their homes for the night, ready the Hawkins Times, watching television, or cooking a homemade dinner – nothing unusual for a balmy Sunday night. Ever since the news of Barbara Holland's death had been unearthed, the Hawkins community had even more...*lowkey*...that is, bland. No one sat out in the yard or on their porches watching the moon take

its shape. No splashing around in the neighbor's pool, or talking and drinking around a small backyard fire. Everything nowadays was just *quiet*. Somehow the lack of activity made the evening stranger.

They rounded down a paved hill and were beginning to veer off the road and onto one of their most-used shortcuts when Dustin stopped short and put his foot down to keep himself from tumbling off his bike.

Mike noticed first, doubling back to see what was the matter. "Hey! Dustin! Is everything okay? Come on, we're almost there!"

Dustin made to clear his throat but it ended in a series of hacks and coughs. "Son of a bitch!" he strangled out, now dismounting his bike entirely and bending over to brace his weight on his knees and try to catch his breath. Will and Lucas had now stopped and walked over, leaving their bikes in the fallen leaves.

Lucas beat a hand on Dustin's back. "Dude, get it together." Dustin waved his hand away and his coughs slowly began to cease.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and spit onto the ground. "Mom started smoking those damn things again," he grumbled as he got back on his bike. "Going to throw every friggin' cigarette out the window! Shit! Onward, fellas!" And they were off once more.

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The earpiece crackled in his ear. It tickled a little, and he had to shake his ear. "Sir, the children are waiting outside."

Dr. Owens was grateful for the interruption. Honestly, he knew Joyce Byers was only concerned, but goddamn, could she lighten up. Could he get a word in? "In due time, I promise. Trust me, yeah?" he said to her as he rose to get the door. Great, more people to take his degree for granted. He should've gone to law school.

"Come in, come in," he said, ushering in the group of boys. They each took their respective place in the room. Will was pulled into Joyce, who squeezed his shoulders as he glanced at Nancy and Jonathan. It was still – even after a few months – weird to see Mike's sister so

close to his brother. They were holding hands and it made Will pull a face. Jonathan grinned at him and rolled his eyes. Dustin, Lucas, and Mike had gone to stand in a huddle beside Nancy and Jonathan, but Mike smiled at Eleven and she smiled back.

"Now," Dr. Owens started, "where were we? Oh, yes, the fung-"

Another burst of coughing sounded in the room, all eyes turning to Dustin in surprise. Lucas nudged him in the shoulder and muttered a *Dude, what is wrong with you?* under his breath. Dr. Owen's eyebrow was raised.

"Hey, kid. You all right over there?" asked Hopper. Dustin held up his middle finger and he kept coughing. Hopper turned to Eleven. "Jesus, how are you friends with these-*"* Joyce smacked his arm and he looked up innocently at her. "-angels?"

Dr. Owens went over to Dustin and walked around him in a circle like a vulture analyzing its next meal. He looked at Jim, who furrowed his brows. Owens stared at Mike next. "Has your friend made contact?"

"Huh?"

"Has he been in Upside Down?"

"Yeah....I mean, but we all have. No thanks to you..." Mike retorted. Nancy raised her chin a little higher, secretly proud of her little brother's spunk.

"Did anything...happen? When you were down there?" the doctor asked.

Everyone in the room looked at him as if he'd turned into a Demogorgon with wings.

"...I mean....anything different? Just him?"

Lucas rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Mike then spoke.

"That puffer thing. It sneezed on him."

Hopper cut his eyes to Dustin, who had stopped coughing and was now silent. The whole room was silent. Dr. Owens smiled and nodded. He clapped his hands together, startling everyone out of their trance. "Okay!" He said. "Well, good news."

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Let me know what you think! This will be multiple chapters and lots of focus on ships (bc I can't tolerate anymore JonathanxStevexBilly fics, no offense to anyone) =D Until the next one..

## 2. Chapter 2

Sorry about any typos - I tried to get them all, but this was a quick upload for me. Thanks in advance for reading!

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The Chief's eyes fluttered open to show a myriad of drifting colors and swirling shapes. *The hell?* He felt a stab-like piercing in his head, right between the eyes, which was the worst place, and a smoothing warmth over his left arm. The colors and shapes slowly began to form identifiable images and his nose began to notice...*something*. It smelled like being a kid. And...tar? He made the muscles of his neck move his head on the pillow – his pillow. In his bed. Hopper breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hey, sleepyhead," Joyce said softly, rubbing his forearm once more. Hopper turned his head fully so he could look at her. There she sat, with a little grin on her face, which was a slight distraction from the purple bags starting to peek out from below her eyes. Hopper used all of the energy he could muster to frown. He grabbed her hand from his arm and gave it a squeeze.

"Hey..." His throat sounded like it was churning rocks. He tried again.

"No, no, no," chided Joyce. "You take it easy, huh?" She got up and gave his pillow a little fluff. "Now...you're just waking up, Hop. Take it easy. Doctor's orders." She smiled as if to prove a point. "Now...let's see....oh! I've – I've got some water here for you," she held up a plastic cup and set it back down, "and there's some soup on the stove...Chicken noodle! Will always wanted it after he got home."

"Joyce..." he cleared his throat, "how long you been here?" Hopper asked confusedly. He swiped the room with his eyes. "Where's my kid? Where's *your* kid?" His parenting skills had seemingly snuck back in after over a year of watching after Eleven, or Jane as he sometimes called her when she'd done something particularly outrageous. Her absence made his heart pause for a beat. From what he remembered they had just been in that shithole, and now-

Joyce shushed him and sat back down on the little sliver of open

mattress beside him. "Oh, she's fine, she's fine! And Will. They're at the Wheeler's...told them to stay the night. I checked with Karen. She said it was *just* fine." Hopper still looked a little dazed. She took his hand again and brought it to her lap. Her hands were shaking. He watched her stare off into the room, taking in the old framed photographs, the peeling wallpaper, the darkness seeping in through the draped windows.

Joyce took a moment to collect her thoughts and Hopper let her. She had forgotten he'd been asleep through most of it and couldn't remember. She wished she could spoon all of the sheer *relief* she had felt right back into him. God, what a mess she had been! And all of that *waiting*. She was still surprised she'd left Owens alive and well before he could give them the news. She turned back to him, now with a tiny bit of moisture gathered behind her lids, and tightened her lips into a smile. He was hers to look after for now, even though he knew, and she knew, he didn't need it. But there were only so many ways one could help the Chief of Police, and Joyce had promised herself she would return the favor to him. To just be there for him. To show that he mattered. He had brought her boy back. He had kept them all safe when he never had to. God, she'd thought he was going to leave them. Like Lonnie. Like Bob. He had sat with her, alone in Will's room when she'd been too broken to speak, breathing the same air, just...silent. And that had been everything.

She felt him squeeze her hand and she let out a breathy laugh.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Hopper," she flicked a few of the tears away with her thumb and wiped them on the covers. "I was just so....scared. I mean, who's ever seen big, bad, Chief Jim Hopper down, ya know?" Her spirits lightened when she realized she'd made him smirk....if only just a little. "But you are going to be *fine*."

"Oh yeah?" he asked.

She leaned forward and pulled his sheets up more toward his chin.  
"Yeah."

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*"I'll try again," Dr. Owens spoke. "So, the upside down has it's own living organisms— comparable to our own world's. Different, but comparable.*

*Luckily, we were able to see and extract an actual living part of the upside down from the sputum we collected from you, Chief...that is, some of that gunk you cough up. Fascinating stuff. Turns out, it's cellular structure is almost identical to some of our fungal species here." The doctor had pulled out his his stress ball mid conversation and now held it steady in one hand as he crossed his arms.*

*"Fungal...so, it's a mushroom? In their lungs?" Nancy asked.*

*"Ugh, I hate mushrooms," Dustin muttered with his head in his hands.*

*"Ah, close! But not exactly." The stress ball went rolling between his palms once again. "There are lots of fungi aside from mushrooms...so many that we haven't even identified them all yet. But they reproduce by releasing what we call spores. Now, these spores....they can either keep replicating and grow to be a mature fungus or they can meet with some more, different spores and merge to grow. Skipping a few key details, but that's the gist of it. The good thing is, we have antifungals that I think can work here. We don't need to worry about the sexual reproduction of the cells, because there's only one type around. We've only charted one type of these organisms in the upside down that releases spores-"*

*"Puffers," interjected Mike. Owens turned to him briefly.*

*"Ok. Only one type of these 'puffers' to emit spores: the kind that got the Chief and Mr. Henderson, here. And our antifungals can tackle those that just want to replicate." He stretched his arms out as if to say 'Ta-da!'*

*"So, what you're saying is....They'll just take some," Joyce looked down at the Chief, "medicine? And it'll be ok?" She was back to wringing her hands, this time in hope instead of anticipation.*

*"Sure. But just in case this goes systemic and is in the blood, we need to do it intravenously. No pills. Strong stuff we're going to give you guys. But it's solid, and from what we know, really kicks the bad gunk out. We'll need to watch the kidneys for a few days...might get pretty weak...but after that, you're home free."*

*What followed for the Chief and Dustin (who had gotten his own round of "tests"), was a series of prods, pokes, and saline bags with intermittent doses of amphotericin B. While they slept, likely do to the occasional*

*administrations of morphine to pain from coughing, the rest of the gang took shifts to do nothing but watch the satisfyingly dull drip of the i.v.'s. Nurses would come in, pry open each patient's mouth, and give a quick swab with a long wooden Q-tip and have them breathe into what looked like a flimsy clear measuring cup with a tube.*

*Then all of a sudden, everything was finished. And they could all go home.*

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"Come in, Mike. Mike! Pick up." The walkie-talkie sat in the middle of the table roared into life. The three boys all launched for it, Lucas getting there first. Eleven sat still but her eyes opened a bit wider and she leaned forward a bit to hear.

"Dustin!? What's your status?" he spoke into the device. Mike snatched it from his hand and looked at it in suspense.

"Aw, man. Feeling pretty rough, guys. But I don't feel like I'm gonna hack up a lung anymore. Stable condition. Do you copy?" The remainder of the party shared whoops and hollers at his response. They had all been concerned after they had heard about Hopper's worsening condition over the past few weeks. Luckily, Dustin's symptoms had apparently gone away almost as soon as they'd started thanks to being in the wrong place at the right time.

Mike responded. "Roger that! That's awesome! See you at school tomorrow... Over!"

"My mom has me on *lockdown* because some dipshit told her I have the flu! I'll see you guys when I see you. Over."

Mike pushed the antennae back down and addressed the party. "He sounded better....don't you think?" He got three nods in response.

"Better," Eleven said.

Will shuffled his feet a little and made the decision to sit back down at the game table, evidence of their latest D&D campaign in disarray across the top.

"Do you think it's over now? You know...finally?" Will asked to the

group, some hesitation in his voice. The rest looked around the room and seemed to be contemplating the question for the first time. After all, they had spent the past two, almost three now, years with the fear of the Upside Down, of what that place had brought – and taken away from – them. Will more than the others had suffered the consequences first hand. The others knew of course, but perhaps not the extent that he went through therapy. He still hated it...but it had been getting easier. Every Thursday, right after school. To the same place that started it all. It seemed they would never be rid of the lab. It just kept regenerating itself, like a bad villain in a comic book who was impossible to defeat.

Mike spoke first. "I don't know...Will, you've been...okay," he said the last part as part statement and part question, casting Will a sympathetic look. Will took a visible breath and shook his head. "And if Dustin is better...well that must mean Chief Hopper is too."

"And we haven't seen one demodog, demogorgon, or demo-anything in a *long* time. Nothing has been going on around the lab. I don't like it...and I don't trust it. But it seems like everything is...." Lucas shrugged his shoulders.

Eleven stayed silent, even when all eyes were looking at her.

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He pressed her to the wood paneling of the wall as soon as they got through the door to his bedroom, the pressure of her head wrinkling the bottom of his Bowie poster. It wasn't important now, but he made a mental note to put some tape on the bottom of it later to smooth it out.

Currently, Jonathan Byers was too busy ravaging the column of Nancy's neck to care about anything else but her, and them, and this moment. Not that they were far and few between. In reality, if they weren't sleeping at his house, it was hers, of course unbeknownst to both of their parents – okay, maybe his mom had an *idea*, but nothing had ever been mentioned. He guessed they were good at being quiet. At opening up windows and...other things.

He started pulling up the hem of her simple pink T-shirt, running his rough fingers up along her rib cage. He could feel her breathing

getting more shallow and he laid a gentle kiss at the junction of her neck and shoulder as he cupped her breasts through her bra.

"Jonathan..." she breathed and she gripped his hips to bring him closer against her core so she could feel him against her. God, she went crazy whenever he was like this. She rarely got to see it, but it got her off even more that she knew she was the only one who ever did. It was one of the many reasons she lov- well, liked him so much. That he let his passion through – this *fire*, that no one would guess he had. As soon as they had learned everything was actually *okay*, that they would have the house to themselves, they were just happy. And she couldn't get enough of him showing how pleased he was that....well, everyone else was.

He didn't hold back like Steve had. Steve had a point to prove, she always felt. Like he was getting a score for how long he could last or how many ways he could flip her body around. She'd always half-expected to see a panel of judges sitting above them while they were having sex. Jonathan didn't care anything about that. He just wanted to make her feel good. And he wasn't embarrassed to show that she made him feel good.

Nancy broke away from him and gave him a coy smile, pushing him backwards until he fell back onto his bed with a gentle bounce. She hopped onto the bed after him and straddled his hips, closing her eyes and tilting her pelvis so that they both moaned together in the stillness of the room around them. She pulled off her shirt and her lacy bra next, tossing them aside without thought. Jonathan brought her down to him, curling his hands behind her neck and back to cradle her as he kissed her, his tongue gliding easily against hers. She raised up on her knees as she began to remove her panties, moving next to her plaid skirt.

"Leave it," he said, giving her a little half smile.

"Hmmm, Mr. Byers....I should've guessed you have fantasies about school girls," she teased.

"Only if it's you, Nance..."

Soon they were moving in tandem, calling out for and gripping each

other with desperate hands. Jonathan brought Nancy back onto her knees, pushing her slightly forward as he stood behind her and hit the sweetest spot she'd ever known.

"Ah! Jonathan!" She was clenching his comforter so that her knuckles were white when she peaked, whimpering loudly as Jonathan pulled out of her, approaching the same end. She helped him finish with her mouth, and when they'd both been sated, collapsed onto their backs to stare at the ceiling. Just as Nancy was about to roll over to face him, the doorbell rang. Jonathan cursed aloud.

"Who could that be?" he muttered as he pulled on a pair of pajama pants and headed toward the living room. He yanked open the door and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Uh, hey, Byers...where's that toothless wonder at?" Jonathan started at Steve with a blank look.

"My little brother's friend?" he asked, now openly wearing a curious expression of disapproval and amusement.

"Yeah, look, I have something for him." He held up a paper bag that rattled. "Dumb kid's sick I heard. No one answers at the house." Jonathan felt a pang of sympathy for Steve, but why, he had no idea.

"I, I think he's fine. I saw him earlier...at the lab. Listen, don't go around saying he's sick, you know? He's good...try again tomorrow." Steve's eyes went dark but he nodded anyway.

"Sure, Byers. Anyway. Oh. Hey, Nance." She peered over Jonathan's shoulder with a little wave. "Ok, uhhh. See you crazy kids later. Don't do anything I wouldn't do." Steve snapped his fingers into two finger guns as he backed away. Jonathan and Nancy shared a look and closed the door.